



# TOWN OF IPSWICH

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## IPSWICH, MASSACHUSETTS 01938

### AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

#### Agricultural Commission Minutes. Meeting of April 6, 2016

Members attending: Jay Stanbury, Ed White, Cole Desmond, Royce Knowlton, Cathy Chadwick, Eric Galicki, Norm Swanson, and Christine Sandulli (alternate)  
Non-members present: Kimberly Nolan, Kelly Jacklin

**The meeting was convened at 7 p.m.**

**Citizen's Queries:** None

**Minutes:** The minutes of the March meeting were approved.

**Meeting with legislators:** State Rep. Brad Hill and State Sen. Bruce Tarr have asked to reschedule. The meeting with them was tentatively rescheduled for Tuesday, June 7, at 7 p.m., pending confirmation of availability of a room.

**Pending legislation:** Brad Mitchell, deputy executive director of the Massachusetts Farm Bureau, reported on pending legislation.

- The Mass Farm Bureau has about 6,000 members, about half of them farmers. The agricultural organizations forming the association are from nine counties and operate independently. The association brings policy states to the legislature and coordinates legislative visits.
- The largest issue currently is the omnibus Ag Bill, which the association supports. Among the act's provisions:
  - Estate tax: The bill requires agricultural land be appraised at its agricultural value, not its development value, for estate tax purposes.
  - Plumbing code: Farmers producing value-added products, such as cheese, have been held to commercial standards in the plumbing code. They can appeal to a board in Boston, but that board is made up of plumbers not always familiar with farming concerns. The bill would establish an advisory committee to re-examine the code and make recommendations for updates.
  - Regulation: The bill would require an impact analysis of regulations.
  - Role of agricultural commissions: More than half of the towns have agricultural commissions, but they are not recognized in state law. Under this legislation, any Board of Health regulation that affects agriculture would need approval from the

local agricultural commission. If the boards do not agree, they would go to mediation. The omnibus bill would also enable agricultural commission to manage town-owned agricultural land.

- Changes in 61B: Assessors would be required to make a determination of 61B non-productive land in 90 days.
- Raw milk: The bill would allow delivery of raw milk off-site, with oversight. A second provision would allow “herd share.” The Farm Bureau **does not support** the “Herd Share” provision, as it exempts raw milk from inspection and adequate testing
- The bill is currently before the Senate Ways and Means Committee and must be passed by July. Mitchell urged commission members to talk to their legislators, advise other boards in town, and work with the Mass. Assn. of Agricultural commissions.
- Other pending legislation eliminates a requirement for licensing riding instructors. It does require CORI checks for instructors and others who work with children, as part of granting a commercial license.
- Meat processing: Currently there is no place in the state where chickens can be taken for slaughter, and it is cost-prohibitive for small farmers to do their own slaughter. The bill would move supervision of slaughter facilities from the Department of Health to the Division of Agricultural Resources, as is done in other states. This bill is now in the House Ways and Means Committee.
- Caged chickens: The Farm Bureau has **opposed** an initiative petition restricting veal crates and caged chickens. There are no caged chicken farms in Massachusetts, but the bill would not allow import of eggs from caged chickens elsewhere and will result in higher costs.
- Pollinators: The farm bureau supports protection of pollinators, but **opposes** this bill, as it would remove access to neonicotinoid pesticides, forcing farmers to use pesticides with much higher risks. The farm bureau also feels it is a bad precedent to allow politicians to make decision best left to scientists.

**Board of Health:** Local boards of health can set more restrictive rules than state regulations, but cannot conflict with state regulations. If there is a question of conflict, Mitchell advised consulting with town counsel. Other options for working with the Board of Health:

- Apply for a state wholesaler license, which by-passes the local boards.
- Involve the board of health, not just the health agent, and let the board of selectmen know there is a problem.
- Consult with the legal counsel of the Mass. Assn of Health Boards, who may meet with the local boards to resolve issues.

**Open space:** The town's open space plan should be reviewed every seven years. The agriculture commission should weigh in on the plan.

**MOTION:** Chairman Jay Stanbury will write to the Speaker of the House urging passage of the omnibus bill. Passed unanimously.

**MOTION:** Stanbury proposed the banner approved at the March meeting to be erected over Route 1A promote agriculture in Ipswich, not the Farmers Market specifically. Motion passed unanimously.

Chadwick asked that the Agricultural Commission have input into Farmers Market decisions, as the commission has made a monetary contribution to the market. Stanbury said he would discuss oversight with the market coordinators.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.